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# GLOBETROTTING SOLDIER-DIPLOMAT VERNON WALTERS RETIRES -- AGAIN

By Richard Murphy

BONN, Aug 14, Reuter - On the wall of Ambassador Vernon Walters' Bonn office hangs a framed newspaper article in which a distinguished American journalist takes him to task for predicting Germany will soon be united.

The article is dated September 1989. Two months later the Berlin Wall was opened, East Germany's communist regime started to collapse and by October the following year the two Germanys were one.

Walters, the veteran U.S. envoy who retires next month ``for the second or third time,'' says he sensed unification was coming even before he was sent to West Germany in April 1989.

``To me, it was clear when the Soviets evacuated Afghanistan that the Brezhnev doctrine was no longer in effect -- that is that the Red Army would march in to prop up unpopular governments against their own people,'' he said in an interview.

``The actual opening of the Wall came as a little bit of a surprise to me, but the rest of the procedure did not.''

Walters, a burly 74-year-old soldier-diplomat who was previously U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, says his two and a half years in Germany were among the most extraordinary of his life.

Normally it doesn't come to anybody of my age to be present at events like the fall of the Wall, German unity...That's an extraordinary climax on which to leave,'' he said.

Twelve years an army general and 10 years an ambassador, Walters worked for almost every U.S. administration for more than four decades in both high-profile and undercover roles.

Fluent in seven languages -- French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch and Russian -- he was deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for four years.

He admits that his plain-speaking -- in whatever language -- has occasionally given his State Department colleagues sleepless nights, but says it has not seriously damaged his career.

His prediction that Germany would soon unite, denounced as irresponsible by some German politicians, gave him a high profile in the country which he maintained throughout his term.

On the verge of departure, Walters advises Germans not to let their Nazi past weigh on them too much as their united country adjusts to its new role in the world.

``I always say to them ``Detest Hitler, detest everything he did, never forget it. But don't become obsessed with this as if this was your only history. This was 12 years of 2,000 years of German history.'''

He urges Germany to play the role of a fully sovereign state and is sceptical of the prevailing view that Bonn's post-war constitution prevents it from deploying its soldiers outside the NATO area. This was the reason Germany gave for not committing

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its forces to the U.S.-led Gulf War effort.

"You know, I read that constitution awfully closely. I've not been able to find the article which has to be changed," Walters said.

He dismisses fears in some European countries that united Germany could again become a power to be feared.

"I'm not worried about the Germans because this Germany is the smallest Germany in a thousand years -- by far the richest. Rich people are not interested in adventures, especially military adventures."

While welcoming East-West arms control agreements, Walters believes the West should not drop its guard because the Soviet Union remains politically unstable.

"I think we should drop considerably -- we're talking in terms of a 50 per cent reduction in troop strength here, which is pretty considerable -- and then pause and see what happens," he said.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms were largely a response to a surge in U.S. defence spending, he argues.

"A lot of Europeans have the idea that Mr Gorbachev woke up one morning and said 'Let's be nice to the West. Let's do away with the party monopoly on power, let's let Eastern Europe go its way, let's let the Germans unite.' If you read Mr Gorbachev's book you will not find one word about any of those things.

"I think the defence effort we were making was so great that the Soviet Union, out of a much smaller gross national product, was unable to keep pace with it.

"I don't regard Gorbachev as a threat but I don't think he has the stability of, let us say, Chancellor Kohl or President Bush, simply because he was not elected by popular vote."

Walters, a bachelor, has at least four books in the pipeline -- a novel about Vietnam, a book about his pets, one or possibly two books about his diplomatic career and another about Germany.

Also planned is a volume entitled "The Mighty and the Meek" -- about the famous and less famous people he has met.

One of his first brushes with the mighty came as a 12-year-old boy, when he wrote to Germany's last emperor Wilhelm II and received a book by the exiled monarch in return.

After a final visit to Berlin this week, Walters sets off on a tour of eastern Europe in his 1980 Chevrolet before returning to Bonn for his farewell party on September 9.

Last year the car attracted the attention of a policeman in the Soviet Union who asked Walters why he was driving such an old model which had 100,000 miles (160,000 km) on the clock.

"I said 'You don't understand. This car was built in the United States of America'."